

## **EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

### **Demographics**

Population: 40% Black, 40% Indian (Hindu/Muslim), 20% mixed and other races

### **Historical Context**

- Trinidad and Tobago colonized and brought under Spanish rule, French influence, and later British rule until independence in 1962, so English is the native language.
- Prior to independence, British system of education was followed, where Roman Catholicism and the Church of England invested heavily. Other denominations now involved include Hinduism, Islam and Protestant.
- Two private schools, based on the American and Canadian systems, opened for enrollment in 1994.

### **Governance and Management**

- The Cabinet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago determines policies and strategic investments.
- The Ministry of Education indirectly manages public primary and secondary schools. Denominational and government-assisted schools are generally managed by special school boards, but are overseen by the Ministry.
- The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education oversees post-secondary/tertiary education institutions.

### **Primary Education**

Mostly publicly-owned schools but there are many private schools, which are generally regarded as better than the public schools

#### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

- ECCE - age 4

#### **Preparatory Schools**

- Prep 1-2 - ages 5-6

#### **Elementary School**

- Standard 1-5 - ages 7-11

In Standard 5, students sit Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) annual exam in literacy, numeracy, reasoning and comprehension skills, science and social studies, for entrance into secondary school. Students select first, second and third choice schools. They have two chances at this exam.

## **Secondary Education**

Public and government-assisted schools are generally better than private schools, which are few in number

Forms 1-5 - ages 12-16

Forms Lower and Upper 6 - ages 17-18

### **CSEC/GCE "Ordinary Level" Exams**

The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) was established by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in 1972 to introduce and administer a regional curriculum in the English-speaking Caribbean. It currently has 16 participating territories. In Form 5 the CXC's Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) exams are taken by students, alongside the traditional British General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary or "O" Level exams. Students graduate with five or more CSEC passes in Grades I-III or GCE Ordinary Level passes in Grades A-C.

### **GCE "Advanced Level" Exams**

College-bound students traditionally pursue the GCE Advanced or "A" Level curriculum by remaining in high school for an extra two years in Forms Lower and Upper 6. They graduate with a minimum of two "A" Level passes, including the General Paper subject. Grades A-E are considered passes but only Grades A-C normally attract credits at U.S. and Canadian universities and colleges.

### **CAPE**

The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam (CAPE), recently introduced in Trinidad and Tobago by the CXC, has been in existence in some other CARICOM member countries for a number of years. The CAPE curriculum offers a modular approach with 1-unit and 2-unit courses. Advanced standing credit could be considered for appropriate 2-unit subjects, but not for 1-unit subjects, because they are more limited in scope. The Advanced Level program is currently being offered alongside the CAPE, but is being phased out in favor of the CAPE.

## **Post-secondary/Tertiary Education**

Varied programs are offered at the certificate, diploma, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, master's degree and doctoral degree levels. There are both local and overseas programs catering to technical, vocational and academic education and training.

The U.S. Embassy hosts a very popular college fair every couple of years and hopes to make it an annual event. Last month College Fair hosted 39 U.S. universities and colleges and 4 local institutions. Besides the primary goal of interacting with the students, their parents and teachers on a personal level, these events provide the ideal opportunity for articulation agreements to be initiated between the U.S. and local institutions.

### **GATE**

All citizens of Trinidad and Tobago pursuing tertiary education in approved local and regional institutions can benefit from the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) program, established in September 2004

and revised in January 2006. Undergraduate students receive free tuition and postgraduate students can access grants to cover up to a maximum of 50% of their tuition fees.

### HELP

Students of Trinidad and Tobago can access soft loans to fund any aspect of their tertiary education through the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education's Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP). HELP was launched on June 22, 2006 and is approved for tertiary-level studies both locally and regionally.

### **Miscellaneous**

Approximately 2,500 students from Trinidad and Tobago enter universities and colleges in the U.S. annually. 75% undergraduate/20% graduate/5% other.

The top states receiving these students are: Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Useful websites: [www.gov.tt](http://www.gov.tt) / [www.nalis.gov.tt](http://www.nalis.gov.tt) / [www.stte.gov.tt](http://www.stte.gov.tt) / [www.uwi.tt](http://www.uwi.tt) /  
[www.utt.edu.tt](http://www.utt.edu.tt) / [www.costaatt.edu.tt](http://www.costaatt.edu.tt) / [www.cxc.org](http://www.cxc.org)

*September 2009*